

Forum: Security Council

Issue: The Question of Yemen

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Introduction

Famous United States World War II military naval general William D. Leahy once said “War cannot be won by destroying women and children.” This is most true in the case of Yemen, which has been described by the United Nations (UN) as the worst humanitarian crisis in modern times.

With two main domestic political powers struggling for control in this Low income Country (LIC), the international community may believe this conflict to be internal and not of concern to the global peace. However; most civilians of the rest of the world do not know of the fractured alliances and seeping influence of terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, Daesh and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which presents the very real threat of ISIS gaining power over yet another country in the Middle East.

The war is ripped between the separatist forces of the Houthis, who control the Northern part of Yemen and are backed by the regional rival Iran, and the Saudi-led coalition with the help of the United States of America (USA) through logistical, and intelligence aid; in this way the international nature of the war is also apparent. Unfortunately, the separation of power do not cease there, as the coalition is further split between former president Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi’s loyalists, and the UAE backed Southern Transitional Council, which has caused infighting in the strategic military base city of Aden.

With a total of 10,000 civilian deaths and a further 40,000 casualty count, brokers of the Yemen war are under heavy scrutiny by the more peaceful nations of the global community, and is a focal point of countless charity organizations. Despite this, Yemen also has the worst outbreak of cholera in modern history since April 2017, with the UN estimating over 1.28 million people to be infected and a further 8 million people to be suffering due to widespread cases of famine in the nation.

Furthermore, territorial contesting of the port city of Hodeidah, through which 70 percent of the humanitarian aid for the Yemen population comes into the country, has led to the UN warning the world that the 23 million people relying on humanitarian aid may be left cut off from any outside help. While the disputes between Houthis and the Saudi led coalition increment in Hodeidah, the borders linking Saudi

and Yemen are also blockaded by the coalition, including an arms embargo cast by the UN Security Council, leading to very limited amounts of aid reaching the Yemen civilians even at the present times.

Definition of Key Terms

Coalition

Coalition refers to temporarily made alliance between, individuals, parties, nations or factions in order to achieve one main goal.

Infighting

A concealed, unseen dispute or conflict that goes on within an organization or state.

Faction

A small, minor organized group within a larger political group with similar characteristics.

Power Vacuum

Power Vacuum is a term which can also be used as an alternative to power void. It refers to a political situation when a leader has lost control over something and there is no individual or organization to settle the chaos or conflict.

Rebellion

A rebellion is a movement of armed resistance against the government or ruling group. A rebellion is the result of constant widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling group or government.

Proxy War

A war in which the parties involved in the conflict do not wage directly in warfare but have their allies or other nations fight for them.

Civil War

Civil War refers to an armed conflict within a country involving a government and at times, a rebel group. It may also involve a revolutionary or independant movement group over the control or separation of a country.

Military intervention

Military intervention refers to a deliberate act of using military force to actively solve a problem in the course of a dispute.

Background Information

Yemen's government has been unstable for a very long time. However, ever since the start of start of the Arab Spring, this situation only became more violent than ever before. The origins of the current crisis begins in 2011, when a massive protest movement in the capital of Sana'a strongly demanded an end to the nation's political elite. Similar to most Arab Spring uprisings, this uprising began with good intentions to reform, enforce new laws and to further root out all corruption within the country. However, tragically, the exact opposite unfolded.

When Yemeni civilians took to the streets a dispute rapidly ignited between the former President Ali Abdullah Saleh and General Ali Mohsen Al Ahmar, also former Vice President of Yemen. To be more specific, there was already an underlying tension and ongoing dispute between the two individuals. Saleh had a strong desire to install his son, Ahmed Ali Saleh as the supreme military leader in the nation instead of Al Ahmar. Therefore this dispute goes back many years but the 2011 uprising marked the point of no return in Yemen history. Both factions mobilized their forces which eventually led to an internal war within the government of Yemen.

The nation's military was divided into two and over time this division crippled the effectiveness of the military. At the backdrop of the political intrigue, the Al Houthi movement led by Abdul Malik Al Houthi and his fellow tribesmen spread throughout the tribal regions of the state, especially in the Shia majority regions in the North of Yemen. The divided Yemeni military perceived Al Houthi rebellion as an absolute nuisance and simply ignored it. In essence, the Saleh and Al Ahmar forces took a big step to confront each other rather than the rebels. This paved the way for Iran to enter the battlefield as the Al Houthi movement was a Shia related rebellion; Iran being a Shia state, and Yemen sharing a very long border with Saudi Arabia, this was an excellent geopolitical motive for Iran to open a fourth front in the ongoing Saudi - Iranian cold war which is ravaging throughout the entire region. Since both nations are not willing to openly engage each other in a military campaign, they have used proxy groups and other nations as their main platform for conflict.

Shortly after, Iran deployed naval vessels in the gulf of Aden under the pretext of combating piracy. However, their true main objective was to support the Al Houthi movement with financial aid, weapons and military power. As a response to this act committed by Iran, Saudi launched an airstrike against the Al Houthi movement near the border of the country. In the capital of Sana'a, President Saleh and Vice President/General Al Ahmar were still in the midst of a dispute. Both leaders attempted to manipulate the civilians uprisings to their favour.

Vice President Al Ahmar responded to this threat by declaring support for the Yemenite uprisings and promising the safety of civilians during their protests. At that point, the nation was on the brink of a complete civil war. Saudi Arabia took quick action to step in under the pretext of the Gulf Cooperation Council, also known as the GCC, to mediate a peaceful agreement between the two powers. However, Saudi Arabia's main concern was not Yemen. Their main concern was the spread of pro-Iranian proxies and thus Saudi needed a stable government in Sana'a. Therefore the Saudi Arabian government arranged an agreement that would ensure the resignation of President Saleh from the office but at the last minute, President Saleh refused to sign the agreement offered by Saudi Arabia. This resulted in renewed protests throughout the nation and shortly after, in June 2011, multiple bombs detonated in a mosque where the President and major members of his government were praying. Four of President Saleh's bodyguards died in the explosion and Saleh suffered from burns on about 40% of his body.

President Hadi

Due to severe burns on his body, Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi was appointed as acting President. Several months later in November 2011, Saleh signed the Saudi Arabian agreement which he had previously refused to do so. The agreement demanded Saleh to step down in favour of the Vice President. In early 2012, Hadi took over the office of Presidency of Yemen and by the end of that year, he relieved General Al Ahmar from his military position.

President Hadi was immediately engaged in his attempt to stabilize the state and restore order within. He began to reorganize the military and the government. This time, the Shia based Al Houthi tribal uprising had spread and had transformed itself into a unified tribal militia under the leadership of Abdul Malik Al Houthi. This was largely accomplished due to the Iranian weapons and military advisers. But on the other hand, the terrorist organization Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula exploited the anarchy of the reign throughout the nation and further intensified their own operations. Within a very short span of time, Al Qaeda controlled vast territories in the south of Yemen.

Rise of the Houthi rebels

During the first few months of 2013, the situation in Yemen got more chaotic. Al Houthi rebels took control over the northern region of Yemen, whilst the terrorist group Al Qaeda controlled the territories in the south. President Hadi's efforts to reorganize the military led to major disputes within the armed forces and a resumption of an internal political conflict. Once again, the military was divided and the generals were mostly fighting amongst themselves. President Hadi, realizing how divided the nation was along sectarian and political lines, opted for a new system. His idea was to reorganize the nation into a federal government of six provinces and thus ensuring a balance of power among the various factions. However in a resource and capital poor country as Yemen, every tribe argued for greater autonomy and for more resources and revenues. Therefore establishing a balance became extremely

challenging. But the largest obstacle was the Al Houthi movement, representing the Shia community, which made up 35%-40% of the population of Yemen.

The Al Houthi movement showed that they did not want to simply become one of the six provinces as they represented such a large portion of the Yemenite society. Abdul Malik argued that his faction was entitled to more power within the new governmental system and as the talks kept ending in fruitless discussions, the rebels decided to take over by force. Therefore in July 2014, the Al Houthi rebels stepped up their military campaign against the government. And since the Yemenite military was divided and stretched thinly throughout the country and fighting Al Qaeda, there was not much to stop the Al Houthi rebels from seizing the capital of Sana'a.

President Hadi tried to delay the siege by transferring his limited military forces to the capital and thus abandoning the southern countryside to the Al Qaeda troops. By exploiting the power vacuum of the military, Al Qaeda made vast territorial gains in southern Yemen in a very short span of time. In Sana'a, the Houthis continued to siege the governmental offices but contrary to popular belief, the Al Houthis and their leader Abdul Malik did not want to govern Yemen. Governing a nation so divided would only weaken the Al Houthi movement, drain their power and financial resources. Instead, the rebels forced the Yemenite government to engage in UN held peace talks. In November 2014, the peace talks resulted in the rebel movement gaining a greater role within the government and even greater local autonomy.

This agreement prevented an all-out civil war and ensured the government's survival, however it rendered the country incapable of any political or economic reforms due to the Houthis disapproval. They further on claimed that some parts of the agreement "undermined their own distinct interests and the nation". Despite the agreement, President Hadi was still determined to prevent the rise of a single dominated faction within the new federal system and thus put forth the nation's chief of staff Ahmad Awad bin Mubarak as a candidate for Prime Minister. The Al Houthi rebellion group rejected the candidacy of Mubarak due to his personal links to the President. So in January 2015 Mubarak was kidnapped, the Al Houthis opposed the new charter of the constitution, and wanted an individual of their choice. In late January, President Hadi was forced to resign after a mass protest by the Houthis. The rebels stormed the Presidential Palace and placed former President Hadi under house arrest. However, in February, Hadi escaped to the port town of Aden to flee to Saudi Arabia.

By the end of 2017, former President Saleh, who for months was allied with the Houthis, offered to put an end to the conflict with the Saudi led coalition. But this move was seen as treacherous by the Houthis and, about 48 hours later, Saleh was found dead outside of Sana'a. The Houthis did admit and take responsibility for his death. The rebels were now being targeted from all sides and most of Saleh's supporters became anti-Houthi. Meanwhile, the Hadi government was battling a new enemy, separatist forces in the south, backed militarily and financially by UAE.

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Saudi Arabia

On 21 April 2015, Saudi military coalition started a military intervention in Yemen against the Houthis, a rebellion group that began in the North of Yemen and soon began to grow throughout, called Operation Decisive Storm. In 2014, Hadi fled to Saudi, asking for military support, and the Houthis took power to defend Yemen from the Saudi-led coalition. This intervention was mandated by Saudi Arabia along with eight other African and Middle Eastern countries.

The Saudi led military invasion led multiple airstrikes and bombings that has caused severe casualties to civilians and negative responses internationally. Each attack killed roughly 1,500 civilians according to UN experts, and it is estimated that from 2015 to 2018 there have been well over 10,000 civilians killed due to Saudi airstrikes. The UN's Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen and Human Rights Watch declared that the airstrikes on Saada Governorate, a military target of Saudi coalition, was against the International Law, blaming the Saudi-led military coalition, for the death and destruction of civilian's health in Yemen.

Iran

Iran has been funding the Houthi rebels in the Yemen civil war; however, this fact has been denied by the Iranian government time and time again. Some officials of Iran also suggested to send military advisors and interventions to the Houthi rebels. Iran's primary aim would be to gain more influence in its surrounding countries. An indicator of this would be the protests and tensions in Bahrain, with the media politically supporting Iran. Currently, Iran hotly contests the capital of Yemen, Sanaa. Tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran are clearly shown through this war.

Another reason for Iran to be funding the Houthi rebels is because the Houthis are a branch of Shi'a Islam and historically, the Shi'a and Sunni muslims (the main branch of Islam in Saudi Arabia) have been involved in many conflicts such as this very war. The religious differences adds fuel to the war and makes the Yemen war not just a civil war, or a proxy war, but also a war of religious influence.

United States of America (USA)

The United States of America has contributed to the Saudi-led military coalition by supplying firearms and outlawed cluster bombs. The US has not been involved in any direct military assistance, however their support through war materials has essentially increased the civilian casualties conflicted by the Saudi-led coalition. The bombs supplied by the US in 2018 for the Saudi-led military coalition

included Lockheed Martin Corporation bombs, which killed a multitude of Yemeni civilians. For example, in August 2018, a Saudi attack hit a school bus killing 51 people. Additionally, they provided intelligence and logistical support aerially, by measures such as aerial refueling and search-and-rescue for downed coalition pilots.

United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA)

The UNOCHA is a UN based organisation which takes action on worldwide humanitarian crises. They attempt to resolve disputes between countries and find a common ground between them. They also issue annual reports to inform the public of ongoing crisis and raise awareness for it. Additionally, they provide funding and humanitarian aid, and reports on their effectiveness. In regards to Yemen, UNOCHA has made major efforts to solve this issue by dedicating \$1.3 billion to aid Yemen. Since 2016 there have been 5 reports on varying issues of the Yemen crisis. The humanitarian crisis has been escalating as it enters its fourth year of war, with the reports stating that there is “severe economic decline, food insecurity and collapse of essential public services continue to take an enormous toll on the population”.

Doctors Without Borders

Doctors without borders (MSF) is a non profit organisation based in Switzerland, and is an international medical non governmental organization. The projects of MSF are aiding those in conflict zones and countries including Sub Saharan Africa, Sri Lanka and Yemen. In Yemen they have 18 hospitals and health centers which provide healthcare for the citizens. They aim to also provide mental health aid to civilians who were affected by the strikes and bombings. MSF currently has over 1,900 staff employed in Yemen and it is one of their largest undertakings yet.

The work by the MSF staff has been proven challenging as their hospitals and ambulances have been under attack numerous times. On October 2015, four of the MSF hospitals and one ambulance in the Haydan district were destroyed by the Saudi led operations. This resulted in two patients being wounded, and due to the strikes it also resulted in 200,000 people of Yemen having no more access to the medical supply. This followed the MSF mobile clinic being hit by another airstrike in December. Their works have been hindered in Yemen, with over half of their medical facilities being seized, but nonetheless MSF aims to continue to provide quality healthcare and aid to the civilians.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
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21st-25th February 2012	Vice President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi was inaugurated as President during Presidential elections.
20th March 2015	Attacks against Aden International Airport and airstrikes on the presidential compound in Aden condemned by members of the Council.
21st March 2015	Hadi makes a speech reiterating his presidency and declaring to restore security in the country.
22nd March 2015	Yemen Civil War Starts
April 2016	UN talks between the government and the Houthi rebel coalition
October 2016	Airstrikes initiated by Saudi-led coalition injure 500 and kill 140 people at a crowded funeral in Sana'a.
January 2017	A United States Commando Raid kills 14 Al-Qaeda militants and their children.
June-November 2017	A cholera outbreak ensues.
4 December 2017	Former President of the Yemen Arab Republic, Ali Abdullah Saleh, is assassinated in Sana'a

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- Renewing sanctions against Yemen, 26 February 2018, **(S/RES/2402)**
- The situation in the Middle East (Yemen), 24 February 2016, **(S/RES/2266 (2016))**
- Middle East (Yemen), 24 February 2015, **(S/RES/2204 (2015))**
- The Yemen sanctions regime, 23 February 2017, **(S/RES/2342)**

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

Due to the ongoing chaos within the country, the UN established a national dialogue to address the future of the country and a new federal system was agreed upon. However tensions flared again when a proposal was made to divide Yemen into 6 federal regions. Saudi Arabia stepped in to respond to President Hadi's pleas and formed a coalition. They set up an air and sea blockade and launched an aerial campaign with the aims of driving the rebel group, Houthis, out and restoring the internationally recognized government. Local observers state that almost a third of the Saudi - led coalition air strikes have targeted non-military zones such as schools, hospitals, marketplaces, wedding ceremonies and funerals.

In the meantime, the United States began carrying out their own campaign in Yemen. It was supporting the Saudi led coalition but also supplying them with billions of dollars worth of weapons.

However one of their main aims were to target the terrorist groups which have gone rogue in Yemen such as Daesh and Al Qaeda, with whom they have had previous conflicts with.

Towards the end of 2017, the situation began to take many turns and former President Saleh suggested an end to this ongoing conflict with a Saudi led coalition, However, the Houthi rebels who were in an alliance with Saleh saw this move as treacherous and assassinated Saleh.

Following the proposal by the UN, claiming that Yemen is on the brink of the world's worst famine in 100 years if the war continues, the US is currently pressing Saudi Arabia to agree to a ceasefire. US officials claimed that they have been watching the ongoing conflict for "long enough" and have proposed a ceasefire on Yemen and is pressing the Saudi-led coalition to agree. This is being seen as a positive steps towards steadily putting an end to the war.

There have been many attempts to solve this issue, such as UN SC resolutions and UN lead peace dialogues. The Saudi led coalition is supported by many nations, one of them being the United Arab Emirates. Although the UAE claim they still are part of the coalition, it is said to be continuing efforts to maintain its own strategic foothold in the south of Yemen, crippling the once united campaign against the Houthis. However, UN officials warn that it is not just the UAE. Most, if not all members of the coalition are pursuing their own agendas. In addition, each side of the conflict is said to have violated both international and humanitarian law.

Possible Solutions

Placing protection, both militarily and politically, over the port city of Hudaydah would be a crucial step towards securing the stream of humanitarian aid which is being supplied into the nation, which would in turn maintain the lives of over 22 million people who are desperately in need of humanitarian assistance. This would secure the path for further agreements between the Houthis and the Saudi led coalition forces, which may prove to be essential when peace talks have to be mediated by the United nations.

However, it should be noted that the Saudi led coalition backed the assault on this port city in June of 2018, which has served not only to anger the Houthis in the attempt to take the port city, but has also endangered the 600,000 residents of Hudaydah and all of the other civilians living off the humanitarian aid being provided by global charities.

Another solution would be to put pressure on Saudi Arabia and Iran to demilitarise actions in Yemen immediately. This would drastically de-escalate the conflict between the two parties, which may save the port city of Hudaydah from destruction as well as bring about a swift ending to the crisis.

Furthermore, this demilitarisation would pave the way to peace talks between the two warring parties of the country, thus restoring peace to the nation.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia and Iran would be very reluctant to demilitarise any of its operations in Yemen, in part due to the military presence of the opposite as well as each country being motivated by varied objectives in the Yemeni war. While Iran wants to back any Shia presence in the Yemeni governing platform, thereby extending its control close to the Saudi Arabian border, the Saudi led coalition want to benefit from the control of the rich oil reserves of Yemen. If both of these issues are met by a third party organisation, the chance of demilitarisation would be made much easier.

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